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The Garment Industry between Local Configurations
and Global Flows

Nicole Constable, *Born out of Place: Migrant Mothers and the Politics of International Labor*,

Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2014, 260 pp.

Siumi Maria Tam



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in Tiananmen Square broadcast just two days before the bloody repression of 4 June 1989. The more conventional *Hong Kong Case* (RTHK, 1989) goes over the colony's history and the handover process. Ordinary Hongkongers and noted politicians voiced their opinions on the future even as the colony was recovering from the Tiananmen trauma. Among those interviewed were pro-democrat leader Martin Lee and current Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying, then secretary general of the Basic Law Drafting Committee.

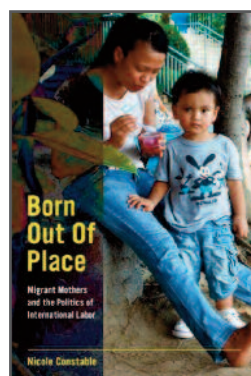
The book ends with two chapters by Ingham on independent documentaries (1973–2013), on which he has already written, especially in one of the rare collective publications on Hong Kong screen arts.⁽³⁾ His panorama of diverse initiatives and structures that led to the rise of independent documentaries in Hong Kong forms a necessary companion to the rest of the book, as it shows that more personal voices exist in addition to those of commercial and official productions. In contrast to the preceding chapters, Ingham chooses an auteur approach befitting the personality of directors as diverse as Shu Kei, Evans Chan, Anson Mak, Louisa Wei, Cheung King-wai, and Tammy Cheung. Each film analysis is rooted in its own references, either to theatre, film essay, direct cinema, or experimental film, stressing that while these works all discuss local politics, they also introduce a more social and artistic dimension to Hong Kong documentaries.

A filmography of works discussed as well as a list of public institutions or private companies mentioned would have been a useful addition to a book that one hopes will encourage more scholars to write on the subject. Despite the limitations of a publication covering such vast ground, *Hong Kong Documentary Film* not only fills a gaping void in studies on this film form, but also responds to the pressing need to examine the history of Hong Kong documentaries from a local viewpoint without excluding television productions or the colonial dimension of some of these films.

■ Translated by N. Jayaram.

■ Judith Pernin is associate researcher at CEFC
(judithpernin@gmail.com).

3. Esther M. K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti, See-Kam Tan (eds), *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2011, 316 pp. Michael Ingham is also the author of "Twenty years on: Hong Kong dissident documentarians and the Tiananmen factor," *Studies in Documentary Film*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2012, pp. 81–97, and of "A Personal Vision of the Hong Kong Cityscape in Anson Mak's Essayistic Documentary Films *One Way Street on a Turntable* and *On the Edge of a Floating City, We Sing*," in Camille Deprez and Judith Pernin (eds), *Post-1990 Documentary: Reconfiguring Independence*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, pp. 151–171.



Nicole Constable,
Born out of Place: Migrant Mothers and the Politics of International Labor,
Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2014, 260 pp.

SIUMI MARIA TAM

This book is a recent addition to Constable's series of research on migrant women as foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in Hong Kong. Like the other publications before it, this book contains rich ethnographic data as well as serves as a sympathetic call for attention to the plight of migrant women workers from Southeast Asia. But quite unlike the rest, this book focuses on the particular difficulties of FDWs as mothers who become pregnant and give birth to babies in Hong Kong. By weaving ethnographic observations and theoretical arguments, the book offers details of the challenges that mothers and children face, some of the choices they have, the different paths they take, and the roles of the fathers and social institutions in shaping them. These together put forward a convincing case of transnational migrant labour as not an individual woman's choice, but rather a co-production of personal, familial, institutional, and global factors.

The book is divided into eight chapters. In the first chapter, "A Very Tiny Problem," Constable outlines a broad framework of the significant actors in the making of the FDWs' world, in particular how government policy has constructed a frame, literally, that cages migrant women workers physically, socially, and culturally, as well as emotionally. The resultant problems are sometimes temporary, but when a child is involved, the problem is complicated and lasts a lifetime. Although in mainstream society, migrant women workers and their problems could be considered a matter of human rights and thus attract the attention of NGOs and some sympathy from the more liberal-minded, FDWs' pregnancies and babies are often shunned, trivialised, and largely ignored. This could partly be due to the small number of babies involved, but more importantly it is related to a mentality that sex is an individual and moral issue. If FDW single mothers are labelled as "adulterers, prostitutes, and 'bad girls'" (p. 10) they will not be pitied. Coupled with this, migrants in general are considered poor and unwelcome, as well as powerless and easily victimised. These stereotypical images of FDWs are not limited to their employers, but exist among almost everyone involved in the network of transnational migration. These include, for example, employment agency staff, immigration and court officials, and ironically even social workers at NGOs and the FDWs themselves. The co-agency and intersubjectivity of this network obviously has a class basis, and the chapter succinctly puts forward a complex case of how class is interwoven with ethnicity, gender, and family duties, as well as women's sexuality.

Chapter 2 reviews the academic literature on migrant domestic workers, dividing them into two broad categories: the first one emphasises the negative side of things – exploitation, abuse, and oppression in global capitalism – while the other sees migration as a resource, noting how migration brings about new agency, pleasure and desire, etc. (p. 23). Constable argues that it

should not be an *either/or* choice when a scholar studies a complex issue such as transnational migrant labour. Rather, she believes that one should take a stand of *and*, examining both the structural constraints and the personal creativity involved in the process. She describes her theoretical and methodological approach as public anthropology with “micro-feminist-ethnographer-activism” (p. 21).

Along this line, Chapter 3 discusses the difficulties that migrant women face, on the one hand as domestic workers, and on the other as mothers, wives, and daughters. These sometimes complementary, causal, but at times contradictory roles of the FDWs are shaped and produced by the two-year renewable contracts based on which FDW’s visas are granted, in addition to “employment policies and practices, overcharging by employment agencies, the two-week rule, and the live-in requirement” (p. 21) imposed on FDWs through working conditions in Hong Kong society. At the same time, they are still under the moral, emotional, and socioeconomic expectations that link them to their places of origin. These paradoxical and interwoven tensions are what Constable describes (p. 56) after Rachel Silvey (*Indonesia*, No. 87, 2009, p. 54) as the “gendered tensions of modernity.” That female morality and sexuality are symbols of family and national honour, and hence a factor of female social and cultural restriction, has been a subject of discussion in feminist literature. Constable places her discussion of the FDWs’ dilemmas in this context, and argues that the dominant beliefs in their countries of origin – Islam for the Indonesians, and Roman Catholicism for the Filipinas – have reinforced this restriction.

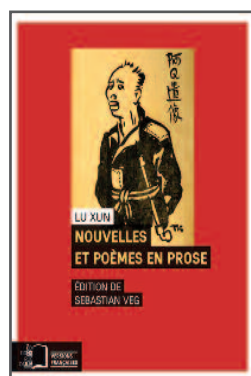
In chapters 4 and 5 this discussion is extended to a pair of overlapping issues – Chapter 4 on the role of men, the fathers of these women’s babies, and Chapter 5 on sex and babies in the migrant women’s lives. Starting with the seemingly obvious question of why FDWs even engage in intimate relations with men and get pregnant under the very restrictive employment policies, Constable traces how a lack of information on contraception, the patriarchal mentality to appease men’s needs, the low sense of responsibility of men, and resignation to luck or God’s will, all contribute to these unwanted pregnancies and the subsequent problems that women have to face alone. Notwithstanding the multiple voids in the migrant women’s lives, these relationships paradoxically offer “hope of family and security in a precarious world” (p. 22).

With these paradoxes in mind, Constable then describes the large range of situations that FDW single mothers find themselves in. Chapter 6 tells stories of a relatively “privileged” group – women who married local men and hence their children were legal citizens, and women who were able to keep their contracts during and after childbirth. Chapter 7, on the other hand, presents the stories of those considered less fortunate – asylum seekers and overstayers who live in constant fear of repatriation, and hence in a miserable, vulnerable, and even dismal state. Under Constable’s sympathetic pen, the stories of these women and their babies can move the reader to tears.

Chapter 8 examines the possibilities of going home. At stake are the woman’s and her family’s reputations among their neighbours, and while family solidarity helps ease the initial stage of return, poverty and lack of opportunities in the home country frequently lead to bad endings. Constable explains her own process of coming to understand the reasons why FDW single mothers prefer to remain in Hong Kong. A woman who has chosen migration, whether to fulfil her duty to her family as a daughter, wife, or mother, or for personal freedom and enjoyment in a metropolitan city like Hong Kong, enters what Constable calls “the migratory cycle of atonement” (p. 230), and often she does so repeatedly (p. 231).

The book, while offering rich ethnographic data and engaging stories and personal narratives, would make an even better contribution to the anthropology of globalisation if it provided more systematic theoretical discussion, for example on how migrant women’s lived experiences are interwoven with social class and ethnicity. And while appreciating Constable’s empathy as an activist and public anthropologist, readers may find the language patronising at times. Nevertheless, the book is well written and is an excellent addition to the literature on women’s transnational labour.

■ Siumi Maria Tam is associate professor in the Department of Anthropology of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (siumitam@cuhk.edu.hk).



Lu Xun,
Nouvelles et poèmes en prose
(Short Stories and Prose Poems),
translated and edited by
Sebastian Veg, Paris, Éditions Rue d’Ulm, “Versions françaises” series, 2015, 664 pp.

YINDE ZHANG

David Damrosch attaches great importance to translation in his definition of world literature, identifying the latter as a mode of reading involving an “elliptical refraction of national literatures” rather than as an established list of canonical works. Translation has a major role to play in our current situation in which the integration of Chinese literature into world literature has yet to be achieved. This volume translated and edited by Sebastian Veg is all the more welcome in this respect because while there have been previous translations into French of Lu Xun (1881–1936), a key figure in twentieth-century Chinese literature, they suffer either from randomness or non-existent availability, or from ideological distortions.

This book, in addition to the pleasures of its fine quality paper and its manageable square format, is also exceptional in the way it combines in one volume Lu Xun’s three collections entitled *Cries* (*Nahan*, 1923), *Wanderings* (*Panghuang*, 1926), and *Weeds* (*Yecao*, 1927). Sebastian Veg justifies this unprecedented inclusion on the grounds of the intrinsic coherence of this body of work within the author’s overall opus. For him, these short stories and prose poems are distinct not only from the journalistic and polemical essays that dominate his later output, but also from the other literary genres that he practiced, such as the tale or the autobiographical memoir (p. 9). This volume includes translations of the short stories that were published in 2004 and 2010, but are now out of print, and it combines them with 23 newly translated prose poems. These are all brought together in a scholarly edition supported by a substantial critical apparatus that provides detailed notes, an inserted commentary on each of the included texts, and an elaborate afterword dealing mainly with *Weeds*. As an expert in literature, intellectual history, and Chinese political debates of the twentieth century, Sebastian Veg imparts to this masterly volume his deep and extensive